Emma Pérez, not to mention other, more recent scholars. And first voice natives could have been found.

In an epilogue, the historian Paula Mitchell Marks reflects on her training in the field. Readers are left wanting more detail: How did sexism manifest itself in her training? How did whiteness privilege her in a state that has disempowered women of color? The editors’ essay “Looking Back, Looking Forward” mentions the need for lesbian history. The editors might have also noted the need for mentorship by male and women historians of graduate women of color, especially African Americans, who are especially few in Texas. Interestingly enough, “master” narratives by male Texas historians are not discussed here, acts necessary to the field’s growth if Texas women’s history is to be more than peripheral or supplemental.


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doi: 10.1093/jahist/jaw195


In this ambitious synthesis, targeted at a non-specialist audience, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz aims to weave the threads of the past two decades of Native American history scholarship into a coherent narrative. Rather than adding native voices to a familiar U.S. history framework, she attempts nothing short of rewriting the U.S. national narrative with empire at its heart. The result is an incisive volume that bridges past and present, employing scholarship on settler colonialism to highlight not only the ongoing effects of colonialism in Indian country but also the ways colonialism endures as a domestic and international structural principle of the United States.

Despite its title the book serves less as a history of indigenous peoples in the United States than an effort “to tell the story of the United States as a colonialist settler-state” (p. 14). The first chapter, “Follow the Corn,” paints a portrait of a vibrant and interconnected Western Hemisphere prior to 1492. Dunbar-Ortiz then presents a series of essays that subdivide U.S. history into periods corresponding to different stages of colonialism. She is skeptical of the scholarly emphasis on cross-cultural negotiation between indigenous people and Europeans, viewing such a focus as an attempt to sidestep colonial guilt, and she rejects the narrative that native people were hapless victims of epidemic disease. Instead, she emphasizes disturbing moments of massacre and territorial dispossession, making the case for systematic genocide as a pattern that “drill[s] to the core of U.S. history, to the very source of the country’s existence” (p. xiii). To make her case, Dunbar-Ortiz turns to histories of federal Indian policy and explores numerous cultural and political themes. For instance, she notes how key figures gained celebrity status as Indian killers, narrates the American Revolution as populist imperialism, unpacks “Indian country” terminology and symbolism in the U.S. military, and highlights statements by President Barack Obama that deny U.S. colonialism.

The book’s primary weaknesses are those of generalization and omission—to some extent unavoidable in a work of synthesis, but a few issues are worth noting. Throughout the book, for instance, the author presents French, British, Spanish, and American colonizers as a largely indistinguishable monolith rather than distinct groups with their own agendas, approaches, and relationships with indigenous people. Curiously, Alaska and Hawaii receive minimal attention, and Dunbar-Ortiz ultimately has more to say about Afghanistan and Iraq than about colonial U.S. territories in the Caribbean and Pacific regions. Lastly, the narrative occasionally bounces from one century to the next, making the organizational logic at times difficult to follow.

An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States is a compelling treatise on the centrality of colonialism in U.S. history; it does not mince words. Its polemical voice may not be

In this sophisticated and insightful book, Traci Brynne Voyles argues that the process of “wastelanding” helps explain the history and persistence of environmental injustice. Environmental racism stems not only from constructed discourses of race but also from constructed conceptions of place. Asserting their colonial dominance over the Navajo, Euro-Americans defined indigenous lands in the American Southwest as wasted and useless, making those landscapes, and the people who inhabited them, pollutable. Wastelanding enabled the development of uranium mining and milling on Navajo land, a continuation of the colonial project with dramatic, if slowly evolving, violence inflicted on both the land and people. “The power exerted over environmental resources,” Voyles explains, “and the ways in which those in power construct knowledge about landscapes, are a central part of how what we now call social injustices are produced” (p. ix).

In exploring the legacy of uranium mining in Navajo country, Voyles draws from tremendously powerful histories: the forced sterilization of indigenous women paired with the reproductive health impacts of radiation exposure; Navajo houses constructed from radioactive uranium mill tailings; and the virtually unknown Rio Puerco accident in 1979, when the containment barriers of a tailings pond in New Mexico failed and sent a radioactive slurry into the river and through reservation lands—the largest accidental release of radioactive material in American history. From these and other stories Voyles builds a convincing case for connections between colonialism, wastelanding, and environmental injustice. She brings her account to the present by examining grassroots activism regarding land tenure, environmental health, and the prospect of renewed uranium mining, underscoring her historical argument by demonstrating the ongoing link between the demands for decolonization and justice.

Each of the six chapters explores a separate theme. The first three chapters assess early Euro-American perspectives on Navajo land and people, uranium prospecting, and the arrival in Monument Valley of both uranium extraction and tourism. The argument gains momentum in the second half of the book, when Voyles powerfully analyzes the gender politics of uranium mining and its impact on Navajo life, the competing geographical visions of the Diné and the uranium industry, and modern land claims controversies.

Voyles employs an impressive array of methodologies, drawing on the archival tools of history, the close textual analysis of literary criticism, and the theoretical frameworks of ethnic and gender studies. At times the theory and jargon interfere with the narrative—terms such as progressive teleology, prolinenal geography, and spatial imaginaries require an attentive reader (pp. 97, 150, 182). The theoretical framework also diverts attention from the material reality of the story. For example, working conditions in the mines and the physical impacts of extraction on the land receive relatively little attention.

These are minor issues. In Wastelanding Voyles provides a powerful conceptual framework for understanding environmental injustice and the legacies of colonialism. This fulfills an urgent need in light of continuing struggles for indigenous rights and the current reconsideration of nuclear power as a potential low-carbon energy source in the face of climate change.

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doi: 10.1093/jahist/jaw197